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The Byzantine Conception of the Latin Barbarian and Distortion in the Greek Narratives of the Early Crusades*

Jason T. Roche

The Byzantine princess, Anna Komnene, famously introduced her account of the First Crusade in Book 10 of the *Alexiad* by insisting that her father, the Byzantine emperor, Alexios I Komnenos, had ‘heard a rumour that countless Frankish armies were approaching’ Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. Alexios ‘dreaded their arrival, knowing as he did their uncontrollable passion, their erratic character and their unpredictability’. A little later ‘the Kelts, as one might guess’, are described as ‘an exceptionally hotheaded race and passionate’.¹ Following Anna, historians have long believed that the disparaging image of the Latin ‘barbarians’ in the Greek texts composed during the middle/late Byzantine periods was a product of increased contact and conflict between Latin Christians and Byzantines.²

As will be examined below, Latins of western Christendom did encroach on the Byzantine world with ever-greater frequency and conspicuousness between the course of the eighth and thirteenth centuries. And by the end of the twelfth century, the Greek texts which record this intrusion do become infused with references to Latins as arrogant, aggressive, and volatile ‘barbarians’. But those same sources reveal that this phenomenon was owing to something other than negative contact with the Latins Christians. In fact, classical Greek literature fashioned the language of authors during this period, and its models and motifs provided them with the means of understanding and interpreting the world around them. Byzantine authors wittingly evoked this corpus of literature when referring to Latins in efforts to demonstrate their erudition.

This article offers a unique comparison of the descriptions of the Latin barbarians found mainly in the Greek sources for the First and Second Crusades with those of the ancient barbarians described in the works of the Byzantines’ favourite tragedian, Euripides.³ The Greek narratives of Anna Komnene, John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates, to which should now be added little-known Greek verse encomia composed by so-called ‘Manganeios

*The present writer would like to thank Paul Stephenson for his comments on the earliest version of this article.

¹ Anna Komnene, pp. 274, 277. The Greek noun *Latinos* first appears as a generic appellation of westerners in a patriarchal decision of 1054. Although archaic ethnonyms such as Kelt and Frank were still employed in the twelfth century, the notion of unified Latin peoples was by then firmly established, and the term *Latinos* was commonly employed to mean all those who observed the Roman Church’s Latin rite: Kazhdan 2001, pp. 84-86.

² See, for example, Asdracha 1983; Shepard 1988, pp. 96–97; Lilie 1993, pp. 278-80.

³ For ease of reference and wherever possible, this article will refer to editions in English of the Greek texts.

Prodromos', are crucial to our understanding of the history of the crusades.⁴ Yet, until now, the fundamental reason these key texts portray the crusaders in the manner they do has not been fully exposed. An exposition of the Byzantine conception of the Latin barbarian will illustrate that the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Greek authors did not formulise perceptions of Latin barbarism; they were in fact evoking ancient conceptions of the non-Greek other. In a volume that seeks a greater understanding of the history of the crusades, it seems vital to recognise how Attic barbarian *topoi* distort the Greek accounts employed to reconstruct Byzantine-Latin interactions. Otherwise, we risk unwittingly evoking the Attic barbarian in our own accounts of the crusades.⁵

Main Points of Contact and Conflict Between Byzantium and Latin Christendom, Eighth to Thirteenth Centuries

As Michael McCormick points out, the 'early medieval societies of Byzantium and western Europe that emerged from the late Roman world shared more than a few institutions, traditions and religious experiences'. Significant contact, conflict and cooperation between those societies – or more specifically, secular and ecclesiastical elites residing in or desiring power in Constantinople and Italy – emerged in the eighth century. Occasional alliances and conflict between Byzantium, the bishops of Rome, and powerful Frankish dynasties continued throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, as did intermittent administrative and doctrinal clashes between popes and patriarchs. Whilst one Byzantine emperor attributed barbarian traits to western warriors, and another even branded a pope and his Latin language as

⁴ Anna Komnene's, John Kinnamos' and Niketas Choniates' histories have received considerable scholarly attention. For useful and succinct introductions to each text the reader is directed to Neville 2018. Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* contains the only full Byzantine account of the First Crusade. Stephenson 2003, pp. 41-54 briefly discusses the apposite historiography up to 2003 and now see Frankopan 2013 and 2014. The rhetorical traditions of the Greek verse encomiasts, as reflected in poems 20 and 24 of the extensive corpus of the so-called 'Manganeios Prodromos', have recently been shown to have had a significant impact on the Greek accounts of the Second Crusade, particularly that of John Kinnamos: see Roche 2015. The present writer is greatly indebted to Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys for providing English translations of poems 20 and 24 (with extensive annotations) from the unpublished corpus of the so-called 'Manganeios Prodromos'. Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys discuss 'Manganeios Prodromos' and poems 20 and 24 in their 'The "Wild Beast from the West"' 2001, pp. 101–16. For published extracts from poems 20 and 24, including some relevant discussion, see Emmanuel Miller in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens grecs*, 2 vols (Paris, 1875–1881): 2: pp. 188, 220–225, 228–229, 757–759. The main Byzantine accounts of the Second Crusade, though widely employed in modern histories, have received very little critical attention. Unfortunately, Omran 1999, does no more than inform the reader of the content of John Kinnamos's account. The only critical analysis of that account is Roche 2015. Simpson 2013, touches on Niketas Choniates' account of the Second Crusade at numerous points in her recent analysis of Choniates and his work. The only dedicated analysis of that account is Roche 2008.

⁵ Cf, for example, Kugler 1866, pp. 119–32; Chalandon 1912, pp. 263–81, 286–88; Runciman 1951–1954, 2: pp. 260–63, 266–68, 274–75; Harris 2003, pp. 95–96.

‘barbarian’, there is a lack of textual evidence displaying sustained hostility towards the peoples of western Christendom during these centuries. In fact, tenth-century Byzantine texts occasionally show positive esteem for the Franks of Christian Europe. The latter part of the century witnessed an intensification of diplomatic relations between Constantinople and Frankish courts, and the propagation of intercultural exchanges.⁶

Contact increased again during the first part of the eleventh century, most notably in the form of pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. Such interaction was not responsible though for the intense hostility toward Latins evident in the Greek texts produced during the central middle ages. The Normans and their appearance in the Mediterranean world were the initial cause of this antagonism. Norman freebooters readily found employment as mercenaries in the warring Lombard duchies of Capua, Salerno and Benevento in the 1020s. Acting with ever-greater independence, the Normans easily moved into Byzantine regions in Italy following the empire’s failure to recover Sicily from the Arabs by 1041. Marianos Argyros, the head of a leading Lombard family from the Byzantine Italian city of Bari, took the opportunity afforded by the collapse of Byzantine authority in Apulia to seize control of the city with the help of Norman mercenaries.⁷ The Byzantines soon won him over and after driving the Normans out of Bari, he was called to Constantinople in 1045 or 1046 to become a trusted supporter of Emperor Constantine Monomachos. Argyros was a patron of the Latin churches during his six years in Constantinople and he clashed with the city’s patriarch, Michael Keroularios, on various theological positions. In 1051, the emperor named Argyros the Master and Duke of Italy, and this seems to have increased the patriarch’s focus on the differences between the Roman and Orthodox rites.⁸

In the meantime, Norman depredations had continued largely unabated in southern Italy, and matters came to head in 1053 when Pope Leo IX and Argyros assembled an anti-Norman coalition of forces. The Normans defeated the soldiers led by the pope near the small town of Civitate before he was able to join with the Byzantine troops under Argyros.⁹ Perhaps the failure of the anti-Norman coalition combined with the growing presence of western merchants in Constantinople focused Keroularios’s attention once more on the theological differences between the Latin and Greek rites. In the wake of Civitate, the patriarch seems to

⁶ McCormick 1995, pp. 349–380; Lounghis 1980; Shepard 1988, pp. 87–94; Ciggaar 1996.

⁷ Loud 2000, pp. 74–5, 78–80, 92–101.

⁸ Tinnefeld 1989; Dvornik 1986.

⁹ Loud 2000, pp. 115–119.

have instigated a passage of increasingly hostile embassies and treatises between representatives of the papal curia and the patriarchal court that laid scurrilous charges against the practices of each other's Church. In a final breakdown of communications in 1054, Michael Keroularios and the papal secretary and legate, Cardinal Humbert of Moyenmoutier of Silva Candida, publically excommunicated each other.¹⁰

Historians have long recognised that the 'schism of 1054' did not lead to a breakdown of communication between the Roman and Orthodox Churches. Indeed, there had been serious schisms before 1054 over points of doctrine and practice and these had not irreparably damaged the perception of the Latin West in the eyes of the Orthodox clergy. The events of 1053–4, however, gave rise to Byzantine anti-Latin treatises that were initially confined to theological discussions on, for example, the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist. Orthodox polemicists then sought to explain their theological differences with the western clergy in terms of alleged moral and spiritual Latin weaknesses. Whilst one must be careful not to overstate the case, it nonetheless remains clear that theological differences alone had begun to malign the peoples of western Christendom by the end of the eleventh century.¹¹

More than theological differences inflamed the rancorous anti-Latin rhetoric that came to characterise the Greek narratives.¹² One by-product of the schism of 1054 was an alliance between the papacy and the Normans of southern Italy, sealed at the council of Melfi in 1059. In recognition of their growing political and military strength, Pope Nicholas II bestowed the papal banner upon the most prominent of the Normans, Robert d'Hauteville, known as Guiscard (the cunning), and invested him as duke of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily. Guiscard soon began to capture the Italian Byzantine towns in earnest and southern Italy was lost to the Byzantines in 1071 with the final capitulation of Bari. There appeared to be no end to Guiscard's ambition. He sent his eldest son, Bohemond of Taranto, to capture Byzantine Corfu in March 1081. A number of pertinent events then happened in quick succession. In April 1081, a young general by the name of Alexios Komnenos deposed the former Byzantine emperor in a military coup. The appearance of Guiscard in Corfu a month later caused the island to capitulate. By June, the duke instigated an attack on the Byzantine mainland that was to continue intermittently until 1085.¹³

¹⁰ Smith 1978, pp. 46–70, 82–99, 115, 174. Frazee 2007; Kolbaba 2012.

¹¹ Kolbaba 2001; Kolbaba 2000; Kolbaba 2006.

¹² Cf. Angold 1995, pp. 506–514.

¹³ Loud 2000, pp. 119–127, 130–137, 186–194, 214–223.

Norman aggression did not stop the Byzantines admiring Norman military prowess.¹⁴ Norman mercenaries found regular employment in Byzantine armies and some, including Hervé Frankopoulos, Robert Crépin and Roussel de Baileul held important Byzantine military posts both before and even after each had rebelled against his paymasters.¹⁵ Robert Guiscard's brother, known to the Byzantines as Constantine Houmbertopoulos, commanded a *tagma* (contingent) of the Franks, while Guiscard's son, Guido (or Guy), and a certain Roger were honoured with money, titles and significant marriage alliances.¹⁶

The First Crusade (1095–1099) largely put a stop to the Byzantine use of Norman mercenaries. Bohemond of Taranto and his nephew, Tancred, led a substantial contingent of Italo-Normans on the crusade. Bohemond's forces clashed with imperial troops en route to Constantinople before he accepted the Byzantine emperor, Alexios I Komnenos, as his overlord during an oath-swearing ceremony in the capital. As vassals of the emperor, the crusaders were to return to him any former Byzantine possessions which might they capture on their expedition.¹⁷ The crusaders still went on to seize the former Byzantine city of Antioch for themselves in 1098, and the city became the capital of the Latin Principality of Antioch with Bohemond as the first princely incumbent. Latin control of Antioch and Bohemond's and Tancred's attacks on Byzantine possessions in Syria and Cilicia were to prove significant causes of contention between the Byzantines and the Latin settlers in Outremer and their supporters in the West. Bohemond's campaign against Byzantine Dyrrachion in 1105–07 was followed by three expeditions led by the emperors themselves against Antioch in 1137–8, 1142–3 and 1158–9.¹⁸ The latter campaign was undertaken just two years after the Byzantines had failed to recover the mainland coastal areas of what was now the Norman Kingdom of Sicily.¹⁹

Armies bound for the Levant on the Second Crusade (1147-8) passed by way of Constantinople, and the Byzantine emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, took pains to ensure that the passage of the armies caused as little disruption to his lands as possible. Notwithstanding

¹⁴ Other Latin Christians were employed in the imperial army. The Varangians, for example, whom formed the core of the emperors' bodyguards in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, included in their number many western warriors. See Blöndal 1978, 2001.

¹⁵ Shepard 1993.

¹⁶ Kazhdan 2001, pp. 92–95.

¹⁷ France 1994, pp. 110–18; cf. Pryor 1984, pp. 111–41.

¹⁸ On the capture of Antioch and the reigns of Bohemond I and Tancred, see Asbridge 2000, pp. 15–68. For the Byzantine expeditions of 1137–8, 1142–3 and 1158–9, see Lilie 1993, pp. 109–12, 117–130, 135–138; Magdalino 1993, pp. 36–41, 67; Harris 2003, pp. 81–87, 105–106.

¹⁹ Magdalino 1993, pp. 57–61.

that the crusaders clashed with imperial soldiers and the native peoples of Thrace en route to the city, the supposed excessive indiscipline of the crusaders, their alleged threat to Constantinople's security and the assumed poor relations between Manuel and the emperor-elect of the west Roman empire, King Conrad III of Germany, are all likely have been exaggerated.²⁰ In fact, a mutual enemy in the form of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily actually brought the successors to the eastern and western Roman empires together a year before the armies of the Second Crusade marched through Byzantium.²¹ The alliance between the Komnenian and Staufen families did not last beyond 1160 though and the death of Manuel Komnenos's German wife, Bertha-Eirene of Sulzbach, the adopted daughter of King Conrad III of Germany.²² Around this time the two empires entered a period of approximately 20 years of 'cold war' in which Manuel sought and gained alliances with the papacy, the Normans, France and the Lombard cities.²³

Manuel Komnenos is well known to have favoured Latins and to have attracted them to Constantinople. We need only look at the number of marriage alliances negotiated and concluded by Manuel with the ruling houses of Latin Christendom to recognise his appreciation of Latin talent and power.²⁴ The number of Latins resident in the empire was higher than ever and western influences permeated the capital during this period. Western merchants, particularly from the Italian maritime city-states, were particularly prominent. Latins were still present in Byzantine armies even if command was now entrusted primarily to Manuel's extended kin. Indeed, in the militarised society of the Komnenian regime, most Latins had less social standing under Manuel than they had previously, but they continued to hold important posts in the diplomatic service where they acted as emissaries, interpreters and ideological advisers.²⁵

Manuel's western sympathies, the threats of the German Staufer, Italo-Normans and the crusades, the conflict over Antioch and war with her Latin prince, and the conspicuous wealth and influence of Italian merchants challenged and threatened the Byzantines on many levels and caused anti-Latin hostility and resentment in Constantinople. These sentiments

²⁰ For the traditional interpretations of the German crusade, see Kugler 1866, pp. 119–47; Chalandon 1912, 2: pp. 263–281, 286–288; Runciman 1951–1954, 2: pp. 260–263, 266–268, 274–275. Now see: Roche 2015, pp. 183–216.

²¹ Vollrath 1979; Hiestand 1993; Tounta 2011.

²² For the most reliable reference to Bertha as Conrad's daughter, see Otto of Freising, pp. 168–80.

²³ Magdalino 1993, pp. 38–40, 42–43, 53–66, 83–95; Stephenson 2000, pp. 239–274.

²⁴ Cf. Magdalino 1988, pp. 189–191.

²⁵ Magdalino 1988, pp. 189–93; Jeffreys 1984; Kazhdan 2001, pp. 96–99; Magdalino 1993, pp. 221–3.

manifested themselves most clearly in the Andronikos Komnenos inspired massacre of Italian merchants in the capital in 1182, two years after Manuel's death.²⁶ Just three years later, the Italo-Normans invaded Byzantium again, capturing both Dyrrachion and Thessalonica before their army was forced to withdraw and evacuate Byzantine territory. It was within this context that Niketas Choniates, the one-time imperial secretary writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century, wrote his oft-quoted lines when referring to 'the most accursed Latins, who were filled with passion for our longing':

Between us and them the greatest gulf of disagreement has been fixed, and we are separated in purpose and diametrically opposed, even though we are closely associated and frequently share the same dwelling. Overweening in their pretentious display of straightforwardness, the Latins would stare up and down at us and behold with curiosity the gentleness and lowliness of our demeanour; and we, looking grimly upon their superciliousness, boastfulness and pompousness, with the drivel from their nose held in the air, are committed to this course and grit our teeth, secure in the power of Christ.²⁷

Arrogant, Aggressive and Volatile Barbarians

Writing in the late 1070s, the judge and courtier, Michael Attaleiates, seems to have been the first to give voice to this hostility and resentment when he referred to Latins as 'barbarian' and 'by nature...faithless'.²⁸ Jonathan Shepard believes that such opinions were directly attributable to the appearance of the Normans in the Mediterranean world and the threat they posed in southern Italy and Sicily. By this hypothesis, the Latins had effectively become barbarians because of their attacks on Byzantine sovereignty.²⁹ It follows that subsequent Latin threats to, and attacks on Byzantine sovereignty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and in particular, the continued Norman aggression from southern Italy and Sicily, the perceived usurpation of, and conflict over Antioch, the martial activities of the Latin Antiochene prince, and the passage of western armies through Byzantine territories during the

²⁶ Brand 1968, pp. 39–43; Harris 2003, pp. 119–120.

²⁷ Niketas Choniates, p. 167.

²⁸ Michael Attaleiates, pp. 229, 337, 343.

²⁹ Shepard, 1988, pp. 96–7.

crusades could only exacerbate the Byzantine perception of Latins as barbarians. As we will see with reference to the First and Second Crusades, the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Greek texts of Anna Komnene, ‘Manganeios Prodromos’, John Kinnamos, and Niketas Choniates offer a sense of the perceived Latin threat and become infused with references to Latins (or Kelts or Franks) as barbarians when relating to such martial activity.

Anti-Latin sentiments are rarely expressed in the extant Greek sources from before the mid-twelfth century though, and it is in fact with Anna Komnene, the oldest child of emperor Alexios I and writing between 1138 and 1153, that we first see the actual articulation of anti-Latin sentiments in a secular context.³⁰ Anna, in her epic prose biography of her father, the *Alexiad*, went beyond previous authors in delineating the ‘barbarians’ as those incapable of the correct pronunciation of the Greek language; this played a role in her denunciation of the Italian ‘Consul of Philosophers’, John Italos, for example.³¹ Anna was clearly drawing on classical precedents here, as language was an important factor in the ancient Greek distinction of themselves and others.³² Nonetheless, Anna’s denunciation of John Italos should still be seen within the same context as her anti-Latin demonising of Robert Guiscard and his son, Bohemond of Taranto.³³ As we have seen, Anna had particular reasons for vilifying Robert and Bohemond both of whom had made attacks on Byzantine sovereignty during the very first years of her father’s reign. She had even more reason to pillory Bohemond, whom we know had seized Antioch for himself during the course of the First Crusade in contravention of his oath to Alexios I. While having little affection for her imperial nephew, Manuel I Komnenos, perhaps Anna’s vituperation was particularly pertinent when we consider that she may have wrote the *Alexiad* soon after another Norman, King Roger II of Sicily, had attacked imperial domains while Manuel was dealing with the Second Crusade.³⁴

It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the appearance and activities of the Normans in the Mediterranean world newly ushered in the Byzantine use of the term ‘barbarian’ as applied to Latin Christians. However, the contemporary sources suggest this phenomenon cannot be ascribed solely to initial Norman aggression or subsequent Latin martial activity. Anna Komnene, for example, repeatedly portrays Latin barbarians on the First Crusade as

³⁰ Reinsch 1989, p. 265.

³¹ Anna Komnene, pp.146-149.

³² Huang 2010, p. 558.

³³ Magdalino 1993, p. 385. Anna’s accounts of Robert’s and Bohemond’s activities are found mainly in books 1 through 6 and 10 through 13 of the *Alexiad*.

³⁴ Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, pp. 84–85.

arrogant, untrustworthy, irrational, undisciplined and volatile.³⁵ Paul Magdalino suggests that Anna invokes the inherent unstable ‘nature of the Franks’ in order to defend her father’s failure to meet his obligations as overlord and accompany the crusaders into Asia Minor or assist them at the siege of Antioch. He asks whether Anna’s portrayal of the Latin crusaders is borne out of the empire’s experiences at the hands of the Normans before the First Crusade (as suggested by Shepard), or whether it is a response to encroaching Latin barbarians at the imperial court at the time of her writing.³⁶ Either way, in addition to the barbarians being defined by their inability to pronounce Greek correctly, Anna also characterises them as proud, grasping and capricious – in addition to being aggressive. Two verse encomia composed late in 1147 by the minor court orator and Anna’s contemporary, the so-called ‘Manganeios Prodromos’, likewise repeatedly characterise the Latin barbarians as impulsive, conceited and disorderly – in addition to be belligerent.³⁷ Clearly, there were factors other than military aggression which made one a barbarian.

Anna Komnene characterises eastern and western barbarians in the same terms noting, for example, that capriciousness, greed and belligerence were attributes of the Latin nature as well as the natural characteristics of Cuman barbarians.³⁸ Shepard argues that Anna’s attribution of similar characteristics to western barbarians and to those originating from the East is not a literary device. He notes that Anna’s portrayal of her father’s methods of courting the Cumans in 1091 and the crusaders in 1097, which involved bestowing gifts, giving feasts and extracting oaths, were the same, and that Anna believed her father had discovered the ‘Kelts’ and the Cumans’ character through experience.³⁹ As Alexios courted the largely nomadic Cumans and the western sedentary Latins in a similar manner, it follows they evidently did share common barbarian traits known to the emperor.⁴⁰

There is an alternative way of interpreting Alexios’s methods in 1091 and 1097. Bestowing gifts and giving banquets were central aspects of Byzantine ceremonial performed at the palatial court. (A stronghold or – as was the case when Alexios met the First Crusaders in the field - even the impressive imperial pavilion replaced the palatial court as and when necessary.) Byzantine ceremonial involved a spectacular show of wealth and dignity intended

³⁵ Anna Komnene, pp. 274-309, 312-315, 411-413.

³⁶ Magdalino 2000, p. 28.

³⁷ ‘Manganeios Prodromos’ portrays the Second Crusaders in these ways throughout poems 20 and 24 of his unpublished corpus.

³⁸ Anna Komnene, pp. 221-224, 274-275, 411-412.

³⁹ See, for example, Anna Komnene, pp. 221, 274, 291.

⁴⁰ Shepard 1988, pp. 97-98.

to dazzle the distinguished foreign visitor to Constantinople. Besides the bestowing of gifts and the giving of banquets, it involved shows of various sorts, games at the Hippodrome, tours of the city's monuments and viewings of her most precious relics. Precious metals, stones and polished marble, rich vestments and draperies, lights, incense and flowers were also intended to impinge on the various senses. In the simplest terms, the ceremonial was supposed to induce a psychological mood in the participants and observers by making verbal and visual statements about imperial authority and dignity, as well as the observers' and participants' connections to the emperor and the empire.⁴¹ In the two cases cited above, we see how aspects of Byzantine ceremonial were exercised for very practical reasons. Alexios exacted the oaths from both the Cumans and the Latins as a means of securing their faithfulness in the midst of the ceremonial. The oaths reflected and reinforced the Byzantine perception of the barbarians' relationship to the emperor. That there were practical reasons for the emperor exacting these tailored oaths should not detract from the fact that standard Byzantine ceremonial was employed to that end. We should therefore see the methods employed by Alexios in 1091 and 1097 with the Cumans and Latins of the First Crusade respectively, not as an illustration of shared Cuman and Latin characteristics, but as examples of the use of aspects of Byzantine ceremonial employed when *any* important foreign barbarian attended on the emperor.

Anna's application of negative characteristic attributes to non-Byzantines was indeed a literary device. The foreign 'other' as barbarian was actually an ancient *topos*. The etymology of the Greek word *βάρβαρος* (*barbaros*) derives from an adjective representing the sound of incomprehensible foreign languages. The notion of the barbarian was shaped in fifth century BCE Athens in response to the Peloponnesian and particularly the Persian wars. The conflict with Persia was conceptualised in Attic tragedy as a struggle between moderate, civilised Greek culture and irrational, alien violence, and this provided the impetus behind the formation of the disorderly barbarian. In contrast to a civilised and disciplined Greek, the foreign other, the anti-Greek, the *barbaros* was impulsive, passionate and violent.⁴²

It is well known the Byzantines considered themselves to be Roman in both cultural and historical terms, and that the Byzantine *Romaioi* of the early middle ages inherited their ancient Greek predecessors' superior attitude toward the foreign other. They believed that the

⁴¹ This is a simplification of a somewhat complex phenomenon. On Byzantine ceremonial, see Magdalino, 1993, pp. 237-248.

⁴² Hall 1997, p. 54; Hall 1989, pp. 56–57; Cartledge 2002, p. 54; Stephenson 2003, pp. 43-46.

empire was at the apex of a complicated hierarchy of states which originally belonged to the Roman *orbis* but that now formed part of the *oikoumene*, broadly understood to be all the civilised lands theoretically subject to the will of the Byzantine emperor.⁴³ During the same period, a corpus of classical literature was gathered and transcribed, and then assimilated during the course of the eleventh century. The educated *Romaioi* now considered themselves as the bulwarks of civilisation, and the contemporary authors whom expressed this notion owed their language and models of writing to Attic Greek and classical literature. That literature underpinned the source portrayal of the foreign barbarian other and frequently provided the way of interpreting and imparting the hierarchical worldview – a view that was largely surpassed by the classical vision of otherness by the twelfth century. Therefore, the negative expressions and perceptions of an earlier age came to replace the friendly condescension and positive esteem shown toward peoples of western Christendom in tenth-century Greek texts. In the words of Paul Stephenson, the foreign barbarian became ‘the universal anti-Greek against whom Hellenic culture was defined. The two identities were polarities and together were universal’. Put very simply, Romans were civilised and pre-eminent; non-Romans were uncivilised and hence barbarians who shared common barbaric traits.⁴⁴

Stereotypes

Stereotypes usually cast certain traits as vices on to target groups, vices which are generally opposite to the virtues admired in the group creating the stereotype. The cardinal Hellenic virtues were defined in the fourth century BCE and included wisdom/intelligence, manliness/courage/bravery, discipline/restraint/temperance and justness. Plato listed the opposing corresponding vices as stupidity/ignorance, cowardice, lack of self-control and lawlessness. The classical Greek tragedians and the medieval Greek historians and verse encomiasts whom drew their literary models, motifs and language from classical literature, and whom frequently addressed the Byzantine struggles and relationships with the Latin world, employed these stereotypes in the same manner.

⁴³ Ostrogorsky 1968, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Mango 1975; Kazhdan, & Epstein 1985, p. 136; Laiou 1991, pp. 71-97; Stephenson 2000, pp. 253–254; Stephenson 2003, pp. 41–54 (quotation at 49); Kaldellis 2007, pp. 225–316; Mullett 2007; Beaton 2008. Note: there were Orthodox barbarians and there were occasions when not all those deemed foreign or ‘outsider’ were barbarian. See Smythe 1992; Mullett 2000; Kaldellis 2013, chapter 4.

Cowardice (and Arrogance)

The ancient barbarians' failure in the Hellenic virtue of courage/manliness/bravery manifests itself in two ways: they may embody cowardice, the Platonic opposite of courage/manliness/bravery, or they may be tremendous braggarts. Despite being heavily outnumbered, Euripides' Orestes and his companion and accomplice in matricide, Pylades, managed to drive off the barbarian Taurians until, exhausted, the swords were knocked from their hands by stones flung from out of harm's way.⁴⁵ Orestes and Pylades were 'Greek lions'. As Electra shouted, they were not 'cowardly Phrygians, but real men.' Again outnumbered, they easily overran Agamemnon's palace in search for Helen, and Pylades had no problem ordering her Phrygian slaves to 'begone'. As one cowardly slave noted, the Phrygians were naturally inferior to the Greeks in 'martial skill and prowess'; they certainly held 'no fear' for Pylades.⁴⁶ The martial prowess of an ancient Greek warrior was indeed naturally superior to that of a barbarian's although prudence tempered a Greek's courage.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Trojans chose to camp outside their city for the first time in ten years following a disastrous day of fighting for the Greeks. Too confident in the day's success, Hector readily believed that the fires now lit in the Greeks' camp was an indication of their imminent flight back to Greece. The vainglorious prince of Troy, discounting the Greek camp's defenses, wanted to attack it that night, proclaiming: 'as they flee and leap on to their ships, I shall attack them fiercely and keep them back here by my spear's might'. He was already 'fully confident' that he had destroyed his enemy.⁴⁸ Even without having tested the martial abilities of the Greeks outside Troy, Rhesos, the barbarian king of Thrace, wanted 'to fight the enemy alone'. He boasted that he needed 'but a single span of sunlight' to fall on the fleet and kill the Greeks before going on to invade Greece itself. Failing to post sentries in his makeshift camp or set his armour ready in case of an attack, Rhesos's boasting brought him destruction at the hands of shrewd, cautious and ruthlessly efficient Greeks on the very same night in which he and Hector made their vainglorious proclamations.⁴⁹

According to Anna Komnene, Hugh of Vermandois, brother of King Philip I of France, 'with all the pride of a Nauatos in his noble birth, his riches and his power' wrote

⁴⁵ Euripides, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶ Euripides, *Orestes*, pp. 79, 85, 88-89.

⁴⁷ Hall 1989, pp. 123-125.

⁴⁸ Euripides, *Rhesus*, pp.133-137, 142.

⁴⁹ Euripides, *Rhesus*, pp.145-147, 149-156.

Alexios Komnenos demanding a magnificent reception when he arrived in Constantinople as Hugh was 'the king of kings, the greatest of all beneath the heavens'. His incredible bombast was duly shattered in a ship wreck and subsequent confinement in 1096 during which 'he was not granted complete freedom'.⁵⁰ Anna describes the notorious Latin nobleman whom dared to sit on the emperor's throne as an 'arrogant, impudent fellow'. In due course he also met his comeuppance when – discounting the advice which Alexios offered him - he 'stupidly rode out in front' of the vanguard at the so-called Battle of Dorylaion (1097).⁵¹

According to 'Manganeios Prodromos', a 'proud', 'arrogant', and 'boastful' King Conrad III of Germany was very much like Rhesos. He too planned on conquering Greek territory during the Second Crusade, and lacking 'calculation' and too 'confident in his weight of numbers', is said to have reckoned that even 'before battle and before any engagements...he was already receiving victory in his hands.' Accordingly, Conrad, the barbarian king of Germany (just like Rhesos, the barbarian king of Thrace before him,) discounted the martial abilities of Greek troops and was thus worsted in a clash with them outside Philipopolis in the late summer of 1147.⁵²

Conrad's arrogance still drove him on to Constantinople, and 'roaring like a wild beast', he wished to capture the Byzantine capital. The Byzantine emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, 'acquiesced in the swelling of a wild impulse and endured the beast's savagery though [his] heart too was boiling courageously'.⁵³ The Davidic virtue of mildness assuaged the emperor's courage.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Conrad, like Helen's Phrygian slaves in Euripides' *Orestes*, was later made to become 'a cowardly, trembling runaway' when a 'tiny detachment' of Greek troops defeated the Latin barbarians outside Constantinople, in the same way that Orestes and Pylades defeated the more numerous Phrygian barbarians.⁵⁵ 'Manganeios Prodromos' now derides Conrad, declaring that 'if you have just pride, haughtiness and vanity, then your conceit and lofty words are in vain. Don't raise your eyes vainly, don't show

⁵⁰ Anna Komnene, pp.279-280, 505, n.57. Nauatos or Novation was a third century Carthaginian priest and schismatic and founder of the sect of Novations. As Frankopan notes, his pride and its exhibition must have been clearer to Anna and her contemporaries than they are to us now.

⁵¹ Anna Komnene, pp. 291, 305.

⁵² 'Manganeios Prodromos,' 20:56–108.

⁵³ 'Manganeios Prodromos,' 20:310–319.

⁵⁴ Cf. Magdalino 1993, pp. 416, 447–448.

⁵⁵ 'Manganeios Prodromos,' 20:330–43.

pride...be restrained, don't make vain boasts.'⁵⁶ These words could easily have been directed at the barbarian Rhesos or indeed Hugh of Vermandois.

Lack of self-control

The Hellenic virtue of discipline/restraint/temperance entailed the proper command of the passions, and many of the barbarians of Attic tragedy are invested with the opposing vice in the form of fiery tempers and wild, bestial natures. Pejorative animal imagery was frequently employed to convey the barbarians' lack of control and their animality,⁵⁷ although it was not limited to them. The Phoenician chorus refers to Thebes' royal fratricides, Eteocles and Polynices, as 'wild beasts'. 'Like boars whetting their savage tusks they came together' when they stabbed each other through the heart. Greeks cannot be free of vice in the tragedies, although it is true that Thebes, a bitter and longstanding enemy of Athens, was often portrayed as xenophobic and tyrannical and thus as the idealised Athenian democracy's mirror image in much the same way as barbarians were in the Attic tragedies.⁵⁸

Medea, the fratricide former princess of the barbarian kingdom of Colchis had a dangerous and wild temperament. Her rage at Jason's decision to take a native Greek bride caused her eyes to glint with a fearsome animality.⁵⁹ With the subsequent murder of the two children she had with Jason, she become a Fury, inhuman and demonic. She was 'more savage by nature than Etruscan Scylla', the monster in female form with six dogs' heads around the lower part of her body.⁶⁰

In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the Thracian king Polymester exhibited the wild, uncontrollable barbarian nature with his terrible song when blinded by the Trojan queen, Hecuba. He then became 'like a four-footed beast of the mountain' crawling around outside the pavilion holding Agamemnon's female captives. He wished to feast on the 'savage beasts' which were his barbarian tormentors, to glut himself 'with their flesh and bones'. He told Agamemnon that he 'leapt like a wild beast in pursuit of these murderous dogs', and in the final scene dehumanising Hecuba, Euripides has Polymestor prophesising that the Trojan queen 'will become a dog with fire-red eyes'.⁶¹

⁵⁶ 'Manganeios Prodromos', 24: 99-104.

⁵⁷ Hall 1989, p. 126.

⁵⁸ Euripides, *Phoenician Women*, pp. xxiii-xxiv, 127-28.

⁵⁹ Euripides, *Medea*, pp. 2-7.

⁶⁰ Euripides, *Medea*, pp. 34-36.

⁶¹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, pp. 29-36.

Anna Komnene describes the infamous priest, whom, having ran out of stones and arrows to shoot at his enemies in 1096, ‘grew impatient, on fire with rage, like a wild animal angrily trying to chase its own tail’.⁶² The followers of Peter the Hermit on the First Crusade, ‘set out on the Nicaea road in complete disorder, without regard to military discipline appropriate to men going off to war’. They were, of course, destroyed but ‘with characteristic Latin arrogance, Peter blamed his men, stating that they had been disobedient and had followed their own whims’.⁶³ The force following Godfrey of Bouillon in 1096, allegedly bent on concurring Constantinople, ‘recklessly and foolishly’ made an attack on the city. Alexios is said to have then sent soldiers to compel Godfrey to cross the Bosphorus, but ‘no sooner had the Latins caught sight of them than they attacked without a moment’s hesitation, not even waiting to ask them what they wanted’. The Romans were victorious, and ‘not long afterwards’ Godfrey ‘submitted to the emperor’s will’.⁶⁴

Writing some 50 years after Anna, Niketas Choniates describes how King Conrad III returned to the fray at Philipoppolis: ‘the king of beasts who had freshly feasted but who, stung in the tail, rushed forward by leaps and bounds’. A few lines later, Frederick of Swabia, better known to history as Frederick Barbarossa, is described as a ‘high-spirited man...overcome by passion’, and elsewhere as ‘a man ungovernable in passion and really presumptuous on account of his immoderate willfulness’.⁶⁵ The flash flood on the plain of Choirobacchoi in September 1147 during which the German army lost many men, animals and material again enraged the ‘wild boars’, who were less rational than the biblical Gadarene swine.⁶⁶ Just like the forces accompanying Peter the Hermit, the Second Crusaders ‘practised great disorder on the march’ and ‘would be very easily overcome by Romans who engaged scientifically’.⁶⁷ And again reminiscent of Peter the Hermit, Conrad disclaimed responsibility for the disorder, blaming it instead ‘the mob’s impulse, recklessly hastening onwards’. John Kinnamos, another one-time imperial secretary writing in the late 1170s and early 1180s, employs Thucydides’ conception of the pseudo-speech and imaginary letter when he has Manuel I Komnenos calmly haranguing Conrad, stating that the ‘inclination of the multitude,

⁶² Anna Komnene, p. 284.

⁶³ Anna Komnene, pp. 278-279.

⁶⁴ Anna Komnene, pp. 285-88.

⁶⁵ Niketas Choniates, p. 37; John Kinnamos, p. 61.

⁶⁶ ‘Manganeios Prodromos’, 20: 197–98, 233–36.

⁶⁷ John Kinnamos, p. 62.

perpetually unmanageable and uncontrollable, has not escaped our empire'.⁶⁸ Alluding to repairs to Constantinople's ancient walls and the approach of the German army on the Second Crusade, 'Manganeios Prodromos', writing in the personae of the city, proclaims that 'the wild beasts had heard that my teeth had fallen out, and came to hunt and devour me'.⁶⁹ Conrad III 'was unable to hide the madness of his nature, [he] openly rushed against the fold to sacrifice the sheep and their shepherds and to rend every lamb with his teeth.'⁷⁰ The Latin barbarians' supposed lack of self-control, their wild, bestial natures in 1097 and 1147 are the same, and just as importantly, they share them with the ancient barbarians Medea, Polymestor and Hecuba.

Stupidity/ignorance

The vice corresponding to intelligence/wisdom was defined by Plato as stupidity/ignorance, and we see this expressed in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, for example. The eponymous heroine had no problem duping Thoas, the barbarian king of Thrace, when she hatched her cunning scheme to escape from the land of the Taurians in the company of Pylades and her brother Orestes.⁷¹ Likewise, Helen demonstrated her intellectual ascendancy over the barbarian king of Egypt, Theoclymenos before she and her husband, Menelaos, outwitted the Egyptians by escaping from the Egyptian coast on the very ship that Theoclymenos was tricked into providing for them.⁷² As Edith Hall points out, the virtue of intelligence/wisdom and its opposing vice of stupidity/ignorance were often manifested in classical literature when Greek intelligence in martial affairs outwitted barbarian brute strength.⁷³ One thinks immediately of Odysseus and Diomedes tricking their way into Rhesos's camp to slaughter the sleeping Thracians and to steal the barbarian king's fine team of horses.⁷⁴

John Kinnamos tells us how Manuel Komnenos, evidently wishing to compel the German army on the Second Crusade to cross the Bosphorus, and,

⁶⁸ John Kinnamos, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁹ 'Manganeios Prodromos', 24: 8-12.

⁷⁰ 'Manganeios Prodromos'. 20: 324-27.

⁷¹ Euripides, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, pp. 33-37.

⁷² Euripides, *Helen*, pp. 153-166.

⁷³ Hall 1989, p. 122.

⁷⁴ Euripides, *Rhesus*, pp. 149-156.

“knowing that the Romans’ army to be much less in number than the barbarians, but that it was equally superior in military science and perseverance in battle...planned as follows. He commanded Prosouch...and many other Roman generals to lead out a sufficient force and take a stand confronting the Germans...as soon as the Germans saw this, seized by great eagerness and disorder, they advanced at a run. A fierce battle developed, and a great slaughter of the Germans occurred. As they attacked, the Romans scientifically resisted and slew them.”⁷⁵

Kinnamos’s inferences have traditionally been accepted. Manuel’s posting of the imperial troops opposite the crusaders was intended to provoke the belligerent and undisciplined Germans into attacking the emperor’s soldiers. The crusaders duly endorsed the emperor’s tactics, rushed in disorder at the imperial troops just as Manuel anticipated, and in line with the emperor’s plan, they were soundly beaten by Greek martial skill and prowess.⁷⁶ Still employing Thucydides’ conception of the pseudo-speech and imaginary letter, Kinnamos then has Manuel writing Conrad and comparing the crusader army to an uncontrollable horse. ‘For I learn that a minute army of Romans which encountered an immense number of Germans manhandled them.’ He advised Conrad that someone with intelligence would know that his large army was naturally inferior to the excellence and skill of a Roman force. The German army was like a weak sparrow or flock of sheep that would suffer from an attack of a single lion (read the Byzantine emperor).⁷⁷

Hellenic virtues and barbarians vices abound in Kinnamos’s account of this episode. The Germans were provoked into an undisciplined attack on the imperial troops because they (just like the soldiers following Godfrey of Bouillon 50 years earlier) completely lacked self-control, the vice opposing the Hellenic virtue of discipline/restraint/temperance. Their innate arrogance seems to have led them to disregard the prowess of the imperial forces, just as Rhesos discounted the need to secure his camp outside Troy and the impudent Latin nobleman whom met his match at Dorylaion ignored the emperor’s advice. The imperial soldiers were then able to combat the errant and impetuous crusaders, whom (like the barbarian kings Thoas and Theoclymenos) were duped into facilitating the schemes of the

⁷⁵ John Kinnamos, p. 65.

⁷⁶ Kugler, pp. 125–30.

⁷⁷ John Kinnamos, p. 66.

Greeks, with the Hellenic virtue of intelligence or ‘military science’, rather than the brute force of the barbarians’ disorderly charge. And just as the slave in Euripides’s *Orestes* noted that ancient Phrygians were inferior to the Greeks in terms of martial skill and prowess, so too were the German barbarians in 1147. As Manuel reminded Conrad, whom again becomes a bestial king like Polymester, the Romans were naturally superior in arms to foreign fighters. This was even the case when, like the Greek ‘lions’ Orestes and Pylades, the emperor’s soldiers faced numerically greater forces. Once Conrad had suffered this setback at the hands of the Byzantines, the German king, just like Godfrey of Bouillon on the First Crusade, was duly compelled to comply with the lion emperor’s demands.⁷⁸ With appropriate evidence, we might provide an explanation for the clash outside Constantinople and the apparent crusader defeat in terms of say, logistical necessity and manpower and tactics. To a twelfth-century Byzantine author imbued with the notion of Latin barbarism, both the reason the crusaders clashed with the Byzantines and the reason they were seemingly defeated lay with their stupidity, unrestrained belligerence and superciliousness. This is not a reasonable explanation for why the crusaders clashed with the imperial soldiers outside Constantinople, and nor can Kinnamos’s evidence be used to reconstruct what actually happened there: the canon of barbarian *topoi* employed to understand and interpret Latin behaviour clearly distorts the author’s testimony.

In evoking archaic and classical traditions of writing, the main Byzantine sources for the First and Second Crusades reveal that in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries – as in the fifth century BCE – the Greeks were brave and doughty warriors whereas the barbarians were often cowardly runaways; the prudence or mildness of the Greeks tempered their courage while arrogance precipitated the barbarians’ downfall; the Greeks exercised constraint over their passions but the barbarians exercised their passions with the abandonment of wild animals; and astute Greeks always outwitted barbarian brutes. The Byzantine perception of the barbarian was ancient and formulaic: a non-Roman was a barbarian and barbarians were stupid, arrogant and bestial.

Alternative Views of the Untamed Barbarian

The untamed barbarian was clearly the polar opposite of the civilised Roman/Byzantine, but this notion was hardly fixed: imperial rhetoric often had to reflect political reality. When

⁷⁸ John Kinnamos, p. 66.

former barbarians settled in imperial territory and became subject to the will of the emperor, for example, writers sometimes explained the presence of barbarians in the *oikoumene* by modifying the notion of the untamed barbarian. The assimilated foreigners no longer exhibited all the typical traits of the barbarian and they inhabited a sort of semi-civilised world that was not entirely barbarian, though certainly not Roman.⁷⁹ Nor did the notion of the foreign barbarian preclude positive observations of the other. For example, just like Michael Attaleiates, the imperial secretary John Zonaras and Anna Komnene before him, Niketas Choniates appears to have had respect for Latin military prowess, a positive trait these historians believed the Latins did not always share with the barbarians of antiquity.⁸⁰ There are several instances when Choniates praises individual Latins such as the Antiochene notable Baldwin (who died bravely at the Battle of Myriokephalon in 1176), Conrad of Montferrat and Frederick Barbarossa. And whilst he frequently displays an anti-Latin sentiment, Choniates condemns the indiscriminating Byzantine animosity towards all Latins, and tells of a Venetian merchant who became his friend.⁸¹ Choniates was not alone in his sporadic praise of the Latins, for both his brother Michael, the archbishop of Athens, and Theodore Balsamon, the exiled Patriarch of Antioch, occasionally show esteem for Latin individuals or respect for western institutions.⁸² There was not a single Byzantine attitude toward westerners and such views may have been much more widespread than historians usually allow.⁸³

Nonetheless, the Byzantine sources referred to in this article often display a preoccupation with the growing strength and influence of the Latin world, and the overall impression given of the western other is a negative one: he is a barbarian. As has been set out for the first time here with reference to the tragedies of Euripides, classical learning and the classical vision of otherness, which provided the language and motifs with which the literate élite and their patrons expressed and reflected their thoughts and concerns, underpinned this negative impression. This poses an unsolved conundrum *apropos* Byzantine perceptions of Latin Christians. The influence of classical literature and rhetoric can only obscure medieval perceptions of the non-Greek other, so how does the development of Byzantine hostility

⁷⁹ Stephenson 2000, pp. 246–250; Kadellis 2013, chapter 4.

⁸⁰ Michael Attaleiates, pp. 61–63, 81–83, 225–229; John Zonaras, 3, p. 697; Anna Komnene, pp. 163, 171; Niketas Choniates, p. 338.

⁸¹ Niketas Choniates, pp. 102, 210, 228–29, 302, 323.

⁸² For example: Michael Choniates, 1 p.183; Theodore Balsamon, p. 176. Cf. Magdalino 1983, p. 344.

⁸³ Cf. Magdalino 1988, pp. 193–199.

witnessed in the medieval texts reflect tangible concerns and attitudes towards Latin Christians borne out of experience? To what extent are the portrayals of Latins in the Byzantine sources a product of classical learning? As has been noted, the Latins' presence in the empire, their ideological and theological differences with the Byzantines, Italo-Norman aggression in the Mediterranean, conflict over the Latin principality of Antioch and the supposed threat of the crusades to Byzantium propagated an anti-Latin sentiment that was voiced by the authors of the age who owed the language, models and motifs to classical literature. Perhaps a study of the twelfth and thirteenth century authors' appeals to an Hellenic identity and its ideals of properly gendered behaviour vis-à-vis the Greek and Latin protagonists during this period may prove fruitful.

What is clear, however, is that the increased contact between the Byzantine and Latin worlds did not create the Byzantine conception of the Latin barbarian: non-Hellenes had been barbarian since the fifth century BCE. One might suggest that Byzantine authors readily perceived the classical barbarian traits in the behaviour of Latins, which, in turn, constituted empirical 'proof' of the verity of the stereotype. A time lag involved in recognising that the troublesome Latins were no better than the barbarians of antiquity may explain why the extensive secular demonising of the Latins is not witnessed until the middle of the twelfth century. But the most important thing to appreciate here is that increased Latin contact with the Byzantine world augmented the repeated use of classical Greek barbarian *topoi* in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Byzantine literature. No one history of the crusades has recognized this phenomenon although by its very nature it distorted the Greek narratives of the First and Second Crusades, sources that are vital to our understanding of the initial Latin expeditions to the Levant. Only by recognizing the ways those narratives are refracted through a distorting classicizing lens can we begin to gain a clear picture of Byzantine-Latin relations in the formative century of the crusading movement, and by extension, a better understanding of those relations in the middle ages and beyond.

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